WPR
Negotiation Webinar with mark@jfdi
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Negotiating A Pay Rise

Here are 10 practical, research-backed tips you can use when negotiating a pay rise in both PR agencies and client-side organisations.

The principles are the same, but for each tip you'll see how to tailor it slightly for PR vs client roles.

1. Build a business case, not a personal plea

- Anchor the conversation in commercial impact: revenue, margin, cost savings, risk reduction, reputation, stakeholder relationships.

- Frame the ask around "how this helps the organisation/team" reduces backlash for assertiveness and improves outcomes.

Agency: link to new business wins, client retention, campaign profitability, upsells, awards that helped retain/attract clients.

Client-side: link to campaign ROI, reputational protection in crises, improved stakeholder trust, cost-effective agency management, and internal influence.

2. Do rigorous market and pay benchmarking

- Research market rates for your role, level, and geography via salary surveys, pay transparency sites and peer conversations.

- Having a specific target number, grounded in data, dramatically strengthens confidence and negotiation outcomes.

Agency: benchmark against similar-sized agencies and titles (CEO, Managing Director, Account Director, Associate Director, etc.), and against competitors known to be "talent magnets."

Client-side: benchmark against sector (FMCG, financial services, public sector, etc.), considering both PR-specific roles and broader comms/corporate affairs roles.

3. Prepare a clear, high anchor (and avoid vague ranges)

- Set a precise figure or narrow band, not "something around X" or "whatever you think is fair."

- Aim a bit higher than the minimum acceptable so there's room to move and still land at a satisfactory number.

Agency: anchor against what top performers at similar level earn and the revenue they manage; make it obvious that the ask is proportionate to the book of business.

Client-side: anchor against both external market rate and internal peers in similar responsibility brackets (e.g. senior marketing, corporate affairs, communications)

4. Time the ask strategically

- Align salary conversations with performance reviews, completed major projects, or successful crises handled not when the manager is overloaded.

- Schedule the meeting explicitly to discuss "role, impact and compensation" rather than dropping it into casual conversations.

Agency: ideal after a major pitch win, successful multi-market campaign, or at year-end when budgets are being set.

Client-side: ideal after a successful product launch, crisis management, annual results, or stakeholder initiative that clearly moved the needle.

5. Use communal language while staying assertive

- Research suggests women are often more successful when they emphasise "we" and "our goals" alongside "I" and "my contribution."

- The trick is to avoid apologising or softening the ask; instead, link pay fairness to team stability, continuity and better outcomes.

Agency: "With my relationships across X and Y accounts, we've secured renewals and incremental scopes; a pay adjustment reflects the value I bring to the wider client portfolio."

Client-side: "My work strengthening our reputation with regulators/media supports the organisation's long-term risk and growth agenda; my compensation should reflect that strategic impact."

6. Come with evidence: a "win file"

- Keep an ongoing record of achievements: metrics, testimonials, emails from clients/colleagues, awards, and examples of going beyond scope.

- Quantifying results (coverage quality, share of voice, sentiment, pipeline from PR, cost savings) makes the case harder to dismiss.

Agency: track campaign KPIs, client satisfaction, retention rates, pitch conversion, award shortlists/wins, and billable utilisation.

Client-side: track reputation metrics, stakeholder feedback, cost efficiencies (e.g. smarter agency use), crisis outcomes, and internal influence (getting difficult initiatives approved).

7. <u>Practice the conversation out loud</u>

- Role-play is critical: practising the ask with a neutral counterpart increases clarity, confidence, and resilience under pressure.

- Rehearse handling pushback (budget, timing, performance objections) so you don’t get derailed in the room.

Agency: simulate a Managing Partner who pushes back on “margin pressure,” “agency-wide bands,” and “internal equity.”

Client-side: simulate a corporate manager citing “global pay policies,” “frozen budgets,” or “we don’t pay PR at that level.”

8. <u>Negotiate the full package not just base</u>

- When budget for salary is “tight,” pivot to other levers: bonus, title, scope, benefits, flexible working, training budget, or accelerated review cycles.

- Turning a “no” into a conditional “yes if X happens by Y date” creates a clear pathway rather than a dead end.

Agency: negotiate things like client mix (more strategic accounts), leadership opportunities (running pitches, mentoring), and visibility (speaking at industry events).

Client-side: negotiate earlier promotion consideration, larger spans of control (e.g. global remit), decision-making authority, and external profile-building (conferences, boards).

9. Build internal allies and sponsors before the ask

- Cultivate mentors and sponsors who will advocate for you and validate your impact behind closed doors.

- Being seen as a strategic partner, not a “service function”—often determines whether a pay case gets traction. Manage your internal reputation

Agency: identify senior leaders who rely on you for key client relationships or new business and get them to informally acknowledge your contribution to decision-makers.

Client-side: build coalitions with marketing, legal, risk, operations - any function that has seen your PR work reduce risk or drive growth.

10. Normalise asking and de-personalise the outcome

- Data shows most women still don’t ask for a raise, yet a large majority of those who do get some increase, so the act of asking itself is powerful.

- Treat negotiation as a professional skill and an ongoing process, not a one-off emotional test of worth; a “no” now is information for the next move, not a verdict on your value.

Agency: See that repeated, well-structured asks over time are part of managing your portfolio and career, just like pitching new business.

Client-side: frame salary negotiation as one of the many stakeholder negotiations you already do, this time, with HR and leadership as the audience.

If you lack confidence in your own objective value

That makes a lot of sense, and the data backs you up: many women feel anxious about negotiating, fear being seen as “pushy,” and end up undervaluing themselves even when they’re highly competent.

Focus on one concept for now: recognise and trust your objective value.

Think of this in three layers you can work with:

1. Separate “worth” from “feelings”

- Normalise the idea that low confidence is not evidence of low value; it’s often a rational response to a system that penalises women for asking.

- Use language like: "Your feelings are data about the environment, not proof that your impact is small." See your hesitation as understandable rather than as a flaw.

2. Build "confidence from evidence," not from pep talks

- Introduce a structured "evidence audit": list concrete outcomes (campaign results, crises handled, stakeholder wins) and assign rough value where possible—money saved, revenue protected, reputation impact.

- Confidence can be treated as a lagging indicator of evidence: you don't need to feel confident to start; you need to gather enough proof that your brain can't easily dismiss.

In PR agencies, you might ask:

- "Which client would be at risk if you left?"
- "What revenue or budget is effectively 'attached' to you?"

Client-side, you might ask:

- "Which senior stakeholders rely on you when something hits the fan?"
- "Where has your work prevented a costly reputation or regulatory issue?"

3. Rewrite the internal story before you rewrite the script

- Many women hold stories like "I'm lucky to be here" or "I need to be perfect before I ask"; these are classic imposter narratives that erode objective self-assessment.

- A simple exercise: write your current story about your career in 3–4 sentences, then rewrite it in third person as if describing a respected peer; the tone usually changes to something far more accurate and powerful.

Agency version: "You lead multi-market campaigns for X and Y, repeatedly trusted with high-risk launches, and your work underpins £Z of annual revenue."

Client-side version: "You are the person senior leadership calls in a crisis, she shapes external narrative in regulated markets, and she steers agency strategy across multiple bran

If you worry about appearing greedy or ungrateful

That fear is incredibly common, and it’s not irrational: women who negotiate assertively can face social backlash and be judged as “greedy,” “pushy,” or “ungrateful” in ways men usually aren’t.

Work on one idea: reframing the ask so it feels fair, not selfish, both to you and to the person across the table.

1. Shift from “more for me” to “fair for the role”

- See the negotiation as aligning your pay with the objective value of the role and responsibilities, not grabbing extra for yourself personally.

- Language like “I’d like my compensation to be brought in line with the scope and impact of my role” feels less like a personal grab and more like a fairness adjustment.

Agency example:

- “The accounts I lead represent £X in revenue and require senior-level decision-making. I’d like my salary to reflect the market rate for this level of responsibility.”

Client-side example:

- “This role carries significant reputational and regulatory risk. I’m asking for my pay to be aligned with comparable corporate affairs roles with similar impact.”

2. Use “service frame” without self-erasing

- Research suggests women can reduce backlash by linking their ask to team, client, or organisational outcomes, while still clearly advocating for themselves.

- Use sentence like: “A fair salary helps me stay fully committed to delivering at this level for the long term, which benefits our clients/brand stability.”

This keeps the communal orientation (I’m here for the organisation) while legitimising their need to be paid properly.

4. Normalize asking as professional, not personal

- Data shows many women feel “greedy” asking for a raise and worry about consequences if they’re turned down, which stops them from asking at all.
- Know that “discussing pay is part of managing your career, like managing a budget or a campaign” is a professional skill, not a personal favour.

A simple line you might use:

- “I’m raising this as part of how I manage my role and career here; I value the organisation and want to ensure my compensation keeps pace with my contribution.”

By Mark Clark

Contact Mark – mark@jfdi.uk.com – if you would like to talk more about any of the above to help you prepare for these type of conversations.